

The software quality problem



By Susan Bradley • [Comment about this article](#)

Every month, for both my home and business computers, I perform my own testing of the side effects of Windows updates and then review the issues that Microsoft has acknowledged.

Most of the time, these issues are posted on the public [Windows release health dashboard](#) at Microsoft Learn. However, sometimes additional information is available to Microsoft 365 customers in the Admin Center. I examine both. If I deem an issue insignificant or consider it a corner case (i.e., uncommon or extreme), then I put security ahead of possible side effects and recommend that updates be installed.

But then there are months like this one. Ugh.

Before making my final decision about whether we should install this month's updates, I'd like to go into my risk analysis in detail so you can understand my concerns.

I'm weighing the risk of the updates themselves against the possibility of a side effect of an update. No, I'm not talking about the issue that several business patchers complain about — one impacting software that uses a loopback setting to self-host a website on its own operating system. Microsoft has titled this issue [IIS websites might fail to load](#), but the side effect concerns more than just IIS websites on servers. It can also trigger impact to a vendor, such as [Duo's two factor desktop application](#). For this bug, I see businesses more at risk but with an IT team in charge that can deal with any side effects.

Duo's notification indicates that to "fix" the issue, you can search for updates, install them, and reboot your machine. The only problem: I see no such online fix. There is a process to deploy a Group Policy fix to remove the triggering issue with a known-issue rollback, or you can uninstall the patches from Windows 11 25H2 and 24H2.

Nor am I talking about the [Smartcard authentication issue](#), also documented by Microsoft. That is most likely to impact businesses too — again, with resources to manage the problem. It's unlikely to affect consumers.

Impacts on the recovery process

I am far more concerned about the bug discovered in the Windows Recovery Environment (WinRE). Microsoft [describes](#) WinRE thusly:

Windows Recovery Environment (WinRE) is a recovery environment that can repair common causes of unbootable operating systems. WinRE is based on Windows Preinstallation Environment (Windows PE), and can be customized with additional drivers, languages, Windows PE Optional Components, and other troubleshooting and diagnostic tools. By default, WinRE is preloaded into the Windows 10 and Windows 11 for desktop editions (Home, Pro, Enterprise, and Education) and Windows Server 2016, and later, installations.

The bug is [USB mouse and keyboard not working in the Windows Recovery Environment \(WinRE\)](#). Microsoft noted:

This issue prevents navigation of any of the recovery options within WinRE. Note that the USB

devices continue to work normally within the Windows operating system.

Microsoft is working to release a solution to resolve this issue in the coming days. More information will be provided when it is available.

This means that the most commonly used peripherals — ordinary, everyday mice and keyboards — won't work if your machine enters WinRE.

In my office, I don't use a backup method that requires or depends upon WinRE. But many consumers do. My concern about this problem was so great that I posted [My October open letter to Redmond](#) to our blog on October 21. I wrote the note the evening before, chastising Microsoft for being very slow to resolve issues and urging Redmond to issue an immediate out-of-band update to fix what is obviously a very stupid error.

My thinking was that Microsoft's customers would need to wait an undue amount of time before a fix was issued. What if you encountered a problem that put you into WinRE, with no way to control it? That is not a scenario you ever want to experience.

My reaction was based long experience with Microsoft's slow response in fixing such serious problems. This time, however, Microsoft issued an out-of-band fix ([KB5070773](#)) on October 20, just before my post to the blog.

It might sound as if all this transpired in just one day. However, the original update that broke WinRE ([KB5066835](#)) had come on Patch Tuesday, October 14. It took Microsoft six days to resolve the matter, not one.

An industry-wide problem

The other day, I stumbled across a post by [Denis Stetskov](#), pointing out that the issue with software quality is not unique to Microsoft but is rather an industry-wide problem. Stetskov uses as an example the fact that the environment we all used to think had extremely high software quality wasn't immune, after all. After the recent Apple macOS 26 (Tahoe) upgrade, a memory leak was discovered in the calculator application, by most standards a relatively simple app.

Stetskov discusses the normalization of "ship now, fix later." I still remember a time when Microsoft would at least attempt to get all code to a certain quality level before releasing the software. This was the era in which CD-ROMS were the distribution method for software — and when the goal was to ship software that was complete, documented, and bug-free. Now the documentation is online, and bug fixes are distributed over the Internet as they become available. We take for granted that we will receive updates to fix any bugs that are released with the initial software.

I was once told to remember that shipping is, indeed, a key milestone vendors must meet. But given today's ability to rapidly deploy fixes electronically, we should not be subject to waiting a long time for fixes to very simple bugs.

On the other hand, there are times that Microsoft doesn't deserve a black eye for patching. For example, the August updates were tied to an issue involving SSD failures, but it was eventually determined that the root cause was not Microsoft's updates but rather beta code in some SSD controllers. Yet two months later, I still see new reports laying the blame unfairly on Microsoft instead of the root cause.

Feature releases and limited rollback

In the midst of dealing with some concerning issues in recent updates, Microsoft is also starting to really push Windows 11 25H2. I've seen it offered up on several machines that are unmanaged. Remember: Once the feature release is installed, you have only ten days to roll back to 24H2.

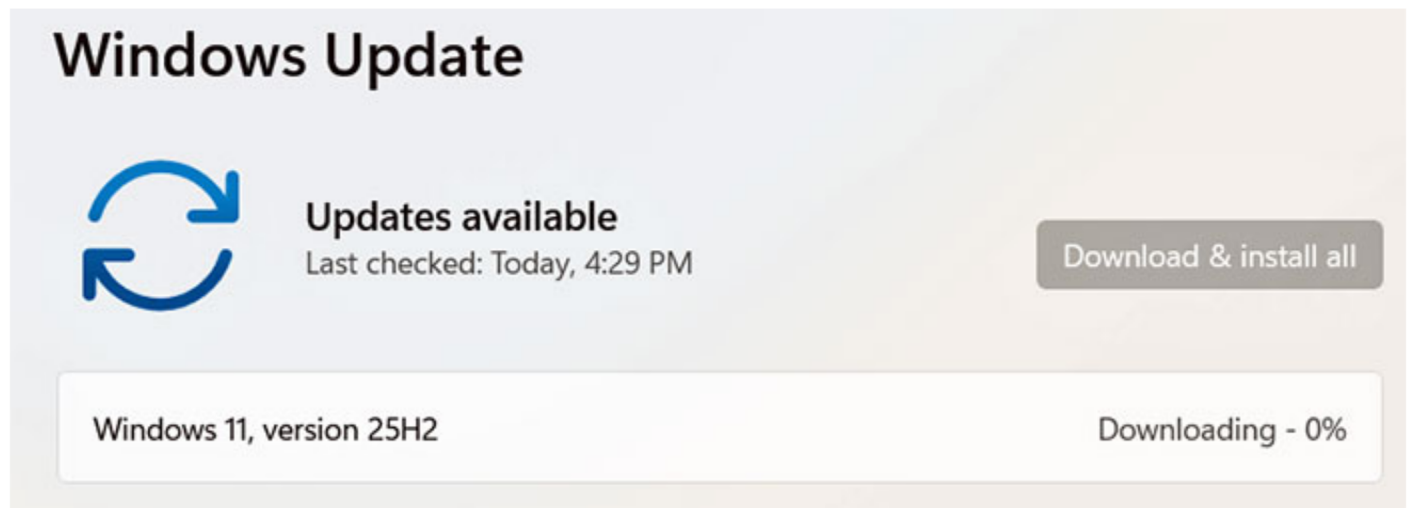


Figure 1. Microsoft will start downloading 25H2 without asking.

You can extend the rollback to 60 days. Run PowerShell as Administrator and type the following command:

```
DISM /Online /Set-OSUninstallWindow /Value:60
```

The size of updates is a problem

When Michael Niehaus worked for Microsoft, he often gave presentations about the management of Windows. Now that he is no longer a Microsoft employee, he can be a bit more, well, honest in expressing his concerns about how Microsoft releases updates.

When Windows 11 shipped, Microsoft touted that the size of updates needed on a monthly basis would be smaller. But Michael, in two recent posts on his blog, points out that the size of these updates has increased dramatically. In the [first post](#), he points out that patch size is larger because of the artificial intelligence bits that are being included. The good news is that the Windows update client is smart enough to download only the bits and parts that it needs. If you don't have a machine that can handle all the AI features, or have not enabled them, you won't see such huge updates.

He also points out that the large [feature releases](#) take up quite a bit a room. If you install from the ISO, this will consume the largest space on your machine. If you do a Web-based install, this will take the least amount of space.

For both of these issues, Michael points out:

But this is just one Windows feature. What's going to happen when they add more AI stuff? 8GB monthly updates to a 5GB OS? That's obviously not a scalable solution. I hope they'll find a better way to distribute that content to Windows 11 devices that need it, as stuffing it into LCUs is a bit much. Given all the other ways that are available to update Windows 11, there has to be a better way.

So what can we do?

Obviously, we need to continue to use the “wait and see” method for all our software platforms. This software-quality problem lies not just with Microsoft. It’s an industry-wide problem; all of us need to demand more from our vendors.

Will I recommend installing updates this month? I’m still deciding. Watch for the next alert!

Resources

- Susan’s [Master Patch List](#)
- The [MS-DEFCON System](#) explained
- [BlockAPatch](#) — Tools to help you hide or block updates
- Steve Gibson’s excellent [InControl](#) to manage feature releases